Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Disaster and Emergency Preparedness for People With Cancer

This information will help you make sure you're prepared in case of a disaster or emergency.

Natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and snowstorms can happen any time of the year, no matter where you live. They can cut off your access to electricity, gas, water, transportation, and internet and telephone services. It's always important to be prepared, but there are some extra steps you should take during your cancer treatment.

Make a plan

Making a plan can help you and your family stay safe, healthy, and connected during a disaster or emergency. Talk about your plan with family, friends, and others who may be able to help you.

It's also important to make a plan with your care team. Talk with them about what to do and how to stay in contact

during a disaster or emergency.

Here are other some things you can do:

- □ Sign up to get emergency alerts through your county or town. You may be able to get them through an app or by text message.
- □ Make sure anyone who can turn off the gas, water, and electricity in your home knows how to do this.
- □ Have a plan for your pets.
- □ Have a back-up power source, such as a battery back-up or generator, in case your power goes out. This is important if you use life-sustaining equipment that runs on electricity, such as a pump or oxygen tank. If you do not have a back-up power source and your power goes out, contact your utility company right away.
- □ Keep all your medications together. Store them somewhere you will be able to get to in an emergency. Include the medications you take every day, and a supply of other medications you may need. These may be medications to help stop:
  - □ Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
  - □ Constipation (pooping less often than usual)
  - □ Diarrhea (loose or watery poop)
  - □ Allergic reactions

- ☐ Fevers

Make a basic ready kit

A basic ready kit is a group of items you may need in an emergency. Making a basic ready kit will help keep you and your family safe and healthy during a disaster.

Your basic ready kit should have:

- ☐ 1 gallon of water for each person every day. This can be used for drinking and personal hygiene (keeping yourself clean).
- ☐ At least a 3-day supply of non-perishable food (food that will not go bad quickly) for each person. Examples of non-perishable food are dried fruit, nuts, canned foods, and pudding.
- ☐ A battery-powered radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert. Make sure to pack extra batteries for each. You can also download the NOAA Weather Radio app on your phone.
- ☐ Flashlight and extra batteries.
- ☐ Cell phone and a cell phone charger.

- □ A set of extra house keys and car keys.
- □ Contact lenses or glasses, and cases for each.
- □ Soap.
- □ Toothbrush and toothpaste.
- □ A first aid kit.
- □ Wipes, garbage bags, and plastic ties.
- □ A few rolls of toilet paper.
- □ Alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- □ Dust mask or cotton t-shirt, to help filter the air.
- □ Plastic sheeting and duct tape, to shelter in place.
- □ Tools (including a wrench or pliers) to turn off the gas, water, and electricity.
- □ A whistle to signal for help.
- □ A manual can opener for food, if your kit contains canned food.
- □ Emergency cash.
- □ A copy of your emergency contacts list.
- □ A copy of your advance directives, such as a Health Care Proxy form.
- □ A copy or scanned image of your prescriptions and the phone number for your pharmacy.

- □ 1 complete change of warm clothing and shoes for each person, including:
  - □ A jacket or coat.
  - □ Long pants.
  - □ A long-sleeved shirt.
  - □ Sturdy shoes.
  - □ A hat and gloves.
  - □ A sleeping bag or warm blanket for each person.
  - □ Underwear.

Add personal medical items to your basic ready kit

Depending on your treatment plan, you may need to add more medical items to your basic ready kit, such as:

- □ Extra first aid items in your first aid kit.
  - □ If you have a low white blood cell count, you're at higher risk for infections. That's why it's important to have clean first aid supplies in your kit. This includes a thermometer, antiseptics (such as alcohol pads or hydrogen peroxide), and antibiotic skin ointments (Bacitracin, Neosporin®). Store them in a sealable storage bag, such as a Ziploc®, so they stay dry.
  - □ Pack extra dressings and supplies for any medical devices you may use. Examples are a central venous

catheter (CVC), drain, or ostomy pouch (bag).

- ☐ Medications and products to help manage the side effects of your chemotherapy (chemo) or radiation treatment.
  - ☐ If you're getting the chemo drug capecitabine (Xeloda®) or fluorouracil (5-FU), pack enough loperamide (Imodium®) for diarrhea. If you have severe (very bad) hand and foot syndrome, pack petroleum jelly (Vaseline®) or Bag Balm®.
  - ☐ If you're getting radiation treatment and have dry mouth, pack Biotene® mouthwash or other supplements your doctor recommends.

Tips for taking care of children

- ☐ If you have children, pack some games and activities to keep them busy. If any are infants, pack baby supplies, such as formula, bottles, and diapers.

Tips for taking care of pets or service animals

Make a ready kit for each pet or service animal. Each ready kit should have:

- ☐ At least a 3-day supply of food and water.
- ☐ A manual can opener for food.
- ☐ A first aid kit.

- ☐ Any medication your pet may need.
- ☐ Copies of medical records that show when your pet got their vaccines. You should also have a list of medications they take and what they take them for.
- ☐ Pet toys or any other items to reduce your pet's stress.
- ☐ Cleaning supplies.
  - ☐ You may need a litter box, paper towels, plastic trash bags, grooming items, and household bleach.
- ☐ Transport supplies.
  - ☐ You will need to transport your pet safely. Make sure you have a sturdy leash or harness.
  - ☐ You may also need a carrier. It should be large enough for your pet to stand comfortably, turn around, and lie down without being cramped.
- ☐ Current photos and a description of your pet. This will help others identify them in case you and your pet get separated.

Stay informed

The following resources are offered by the National Cancer Institute (NCI). They can provide you with information and support during a disaster or emergency.

NCI's Cancer Information Service (CIS)

www.cancer.gov/contact
CIS provides information about disaster preparation and updates on the location of a disaster. If you've been displaced to another location, CIS can refer you to nearby cancer centers or NCI Community Oncology Research Program (NCORP) sites. For more information, email NCIinfo@nih.gov or call 800-422-6237 (800-4-CANCER). You can also reach the CIS through a live online chat service called LiveHealth® at livehelp.cancer.gov/app/chat/chat_launch. All services are available in English and Spanish.

NCI's Emergency Resources for the Cancer Community
www.cancer.gov/contact/emergency-preparedness
This site provides the latest information on emergency resources for the cancer community. It also has a printable wallet card you can carry that has easy-to-access information you can show to healthcare providers.

Write down important information

Make sure to write down important information on paper in case you cannot use your phone or other device. During a disaster or emergency, your cell phone may not work, and batteries may drain fast.

Write down important phone numbers and include local and out-of-state contacts.

Name	Relationship	Phone Number	Email

Write down the contact information for all your healthcare providers.

Name	Type of Provider	Phone Number	Hospital

Write down the exact diagnosis and stage of your cancer. If you're getting chemo or radiation, know where you are in your treatment cycle. During a disaster or emergency, you may need to see a doctor who doesn't know anything about your treatment.

Cancer Type	Cancer Stage	Treatment Notes

If you're in a clinical trial (research study), write down information about the trial. This will help you get the right care during a disaster or emergency.

Clinical Trial Registration Number (#NCT)	Principal Investigator	Phone Number	Treatment

Write down your medical and prescription insurance information.

Company	ID Number	Group Number	Phone Number

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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